



Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW**  
**Director, Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement**  
**Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc**

**In support of proposed Senate Bill 330: An Act Establishing a Human Right to Equal Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Health and House Bill 6093: An Act Concerning Consideration of Immigration Status by Health Carriers.**

Senator Lesser, Representative Scanlon, and honorable members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of proposed Senate Bill 330: An Act Establishing a Human Right to Equal Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Health and House Bill 6093: An Act Concerning Consideration of Immigration Status by Health Carriers. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 60,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services. As a health care provider and advocate, we believe all people in Connecticut deserves access to quality, affordable health care as a basic human right-regardless of income, insurance, or immigration status. SB 330 will restore language in statute stating that the human right to health care is a priority as a state.<sup>i</sup> HB 6093 would prohibit health insurance and health carriers from denying health insurance policies to anyone in this state based on immigration status.

Systemic and economic barriers have made it disproportionately difficult for many people of color to access health care. As a result, people of color have worse access to reproductive health care — and worse health outcomes. Black women are 71 percent more likely to die from cervical cancer and 243 percent more likely to die from pregnancy- or childbirth-related causes than White women. And Black and Latina women make up more than 80 percent of women living with HIV/AIDS. SB 330 is one way to ensure a commitment by our state to addressing some of the barriers that lead to such health disparities and barriers people in our state face in accessing high quality, affordable health care and health care coverage.

Barriers to health care coverage substantially impact immigrant women and families with low income. Lack of access to health care, including preventive care, contributes to poorer health outcomes for immigrants. Federal law already blocks many immigrants from accessing private and public health care coverage, and harsh immigration enforcement makes it difficult for communities to seek out health care or raise their families without fear. Currently, federal law prohibits undocumented immigrants, as well as many lawfully present immigrants, from enrolling in Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Federal law bans undocumented immigrants from purchasing affordable health insurance on the Marketplace, even with their own funds. About 60% of, non-U.S. citizen, low income immigrant women of reproductive age lack health insurance, which is more than twice the proportion of low-income U.S.-born women. Because many immigrant women can't access private or public health coverage, they are less likely than other U.S. women to access preventive health care — such as Pap tests, STD screenings, and birth control.

What's more, the consequences of being undocumented can contribute to a culture of fear in the immigrant community and keep too many from seeking the lifesaving care they need. We know what happens when communities who already face barriers in accessing care are driven further into the shadows — they will forgo the care they need to preserve their own safety and economic security for their families. Bottom line: No one's health should be compromised because of their immigration status. Health care is a human right. That's why Planned Parenthood health centers' motto is "care — no matter what".

People who are denied health coverage because of their immigration status depend on health care providers like Planned Parenthood who will provide them with affordable, basic primary and preventive health care. The Federal Title X program provides funding which helps ensure that every person — regardless of where they live, how much money they make, their background, or whether or not they have health insurance — has access to basic, preventive reproductive health care and gives them more control over their lives, health, careers, and economic security. Yet the Trump-Pence administration is intent on dismantling the nation's family planning program, through the gag rule, making it even more difficult people

with low incomes to access essential reproductive health care like wellness exams, birth control, STI testing, and cancer screenings. This gag rule will only increase the disparity between people who do have health care and those who don't. Make no mistake—this rule is a cruel, direct attack on anyone who can't afford the rising costs of health care.

People achieve reproductive freedom when they have full autonomy over their bodies and lives – this not only includes access to health care, but it is the ability to live without fear of having families torn apart, and to live without fear of harm from discriminatory policies. Our patients need more than just the health care they access in our centers, they need quality education, affordable housing and they need a living wage. We believe that the ability to live and thrive without fear and the ability to access health care are basic human rights. And that's why we are here and that is why we will keep fighting for our patients and our communities.

Planned Parenthood will continue to fight for policies that protect the rights of all people to ensure our patients and our communities have what they need to live healthy and self-determined lives. We strongly support proposed bills SB 330 and HB 6093 as a small step towards our vision of health equity. We urge the committee and legislature to vote favorably to ensure that all people have access to health care, a fundamental human right that should be guaranteed to all people in our state.

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<sup>1</sup> Enabling language was placed in statute (Conn.Gen.Stat. § 38a-1051) with the creation of the Health Equity Commission, which ceased operation in 2016, due to lack of funding and the statement was removed from statute. We support adding this back in statute "The General Assembly finds that (1) Equal enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a human right and a priority of the state (2) research and experience demonstrate that inhabitants of the state experience barriers to the equal enjoyment of good health based on race, gender, national origin and linguistic ability, and (3) addressing such barriers, and others that may arise in the future, requires the collection, analysis and reporting of information, the identification of causes, and the development and implementation of policy solutions that address health disparities while improving the health of the public."